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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 L-01 PM-03 INR-05 SP-02 SAB-01

PRS-01 SIL-01 EB-03 /038 W
---------- 112237
R 062206Z APR 76
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7333

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PFOR, PN, PQ
SUBJECT: CANAL ZONE EMPLOYEE RELATIONS PROBLEM

SUMMARY: CANAL ZONE AMERICAN EMPLOYEES SENT OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNOR DISAVOWING SETTLEMENT OF MARCH 20 AGREED TO BY LABOR UNIONS AND CALLING FOR ASSURANCES THAT NO FURTHER ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN WHICH WOULD REDUCE EMPLOYEES SALARIES OR BENEFITS. DOCUMENT CONCERNING LEGAL BASIS OF US POSITION CANAL ZONE AND HOSTILE TO NEW TREATY HAS BEEN CIRCULATING IN ZONE AND HAS RECEIVED SOME ADVERSE MENTION IN LOCAL PRESS. PACIFIC CIVIC COUNCIL GROUP WAS GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH RESULTS OF RECENT WASHINGTON TRIP, AND PARTICULARLY PLEASED BY WARM RECEPTION IN DEPARTMENT FROM ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS AND MINISTER BELL. IT IS CLEAR THAT AMERICAN EMPLOYEES AS A BODY DO NOT CONSIDER LABOR UNION GOALS OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AS A PANACEA FOR THEIR COMPLAINTS AGAINST CANAL MANAGEMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. ENGLISH-LANGUAGE "STAR AND HERALD" FOR WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, PUBLISHED FULL TEXT OF LENGTHY OPEN LETTER TO CANAL ZONE GOVERNOR PARFITT, SIGNED BY 16 INDIVIDUAL
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EMPLOYEES OF COMPANY/GOVERNMENT. LETTER PROTESTED

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ACTIONS RECOMMENDED IN MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING OF MARCH 20, WHICH ENDED WEEK-LONG SICKOUT THAT ALMOST CLOSED CANAL, AND CALLED IT "TRULY UNFORTUNATE" THAT "THOSE WHO SPOKE ON OUR BEHALF" (I.E., LEADERS OF CANAL ZONE LABOR UNIONS) AGREED TO IT, "FOR THEY DID SO WITHOUT OUR CONSENT."

2. LETTER ALLEGED EMPLOYEES RETURN TO WORK WAS MORE A REFLECTION THAT ACTION SUCH AS SICKOUT WENT AGAINST THEIR BASIC PRINCIPLES THAN IT WAS A MEASURE OF EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION WITH MEMORANDUM. IT STATED THAT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING BECAME AN ISSUE ONLY AFTER DISPUTE COMMENCED, AND "...THE SPONTANEOUS ACTION WHICH OCCURRED WAS THE MANIFESTATION OF THE CULMINATION OF OUR DEEP SEATED FEELINGS OF FEAR, DESPAIR, FRUSTRATION AND ANGER AND WAS AN ACT OF DESPERATION... OUR EFFORTS TO COMMUNICATE BY CONVENTIONAL MEANS AND THROUGH CONVENTIONAL CHANNELS HAD BEEN EXHAUSTED."

3. DEPLORING WHAT IT SAW AS A PATTERN OF STEPS WHICH WERE DIMINISHING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE AMERICAN EMPLOYEE, LETTER CONTINUED: "THIS IS PARTICULARLY DISTRESSING TO US WHEN YOU CONSIDER THAT WE KNOW OF NO APPARENT MANDATE AND THAT NO EXPLANATION OR RATIONALE HAS EVER BEEN PROVIDED FOR THESE ACTIONS WHICH WE CAN ONLY CONSTRUE AS ACTIONS PREEMPTIVE TO A TREATY WHICH IS PRESENTLY BEING NEGOTIATED BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA." LETTER SAID ONLY ACCEPTANCE BY GOVERNOR OF FOLLOWING THREE PROPOSALS WOULD "PUT AN END TO THE CONTINUING STATE OF INTENSE UNREST" AND REESTABLISH RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN GOVERNOR AND EMPLOYEES:

A. RESCIND FEBRUARY 17 CANAL ZONE CIVILIAN PERSONNEL POLICY COORDINATING BOARD PROPOSALS AND "ESTABLISH THE POLICY THAT NO ACTION WILL BE TAKEN WHICH WILL HAVE THE EFFECT OF FURTHER DIMINISHING THE QUALITY OF COMMUNITY LIFE, THE PRESENCE OR THE STATUS OF THE UNITED STATES CITIZEN EMPLOYEES IN THE CANAL ZONE... WITHOUT THE AUTHORIZATION AND FULL CONSENT OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

UNITED STATES CONGRESS."

B. COMMITMENT TO ESTABLISH COMMITTEE WITH LABOR PARTICIPATION TO PLAN TO ADMINISTRATIVELY ADOPT "IN A SPECIAL WAY" CONCEPT OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AS SET FORTH IN EO 11491, AS AMENDED, OR OTHER MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE FORM APPLICABLE TO ALL EMPLOYEES IN CANAL ZONE.

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C. "CEASE ALL ACTIONS WHICH, IF IMPLEMENTED, WOULD EFFECTIVELY REDUCE OR ELIMINATE THE PAY OR FRINGE BENEFITS OF ALL PRESENT AND FUTURE UNITED STATES CITIZEN EMPLOYEES REGARDLESS OF WHETHER SUCH ACTIONS ARE RELATED TO THE CURRENT 'AUSTERITY' PROGRAM."

4. THE 16 SIGNERS INCLUDED BOTH WHITE-COLLAR AND OTHER EMPLOYEES, MOSTLY IN SUPERVISORY POSITIONS; ALL WERE RELATIVELY SENIOR AND SOME OCCUPY PCC/CZG BUREAU-LEVEL POSITIONS IN PERSONNEL OR LABOR RELATIONS. NONE WERE SENIOR LABOR UNION OFFICIALS. LETTER STATED THAT SECOND COPY WILL FOLLOW IN FEW DAYS WITH "MULTITUDE" OF ADDITIONAL SIGNATURES OF US EMPLOYEES. FULL TEXT OF LETTER POUCHED ARA/PAN. ONLY COVERAGE OF LETTER IN SPANISH-LANGUAGE PRESS HAS BEEN BACK-PAGE ARTICLE PRINTING EXCERPTS IN APRIL 2 EDITION OF "ESTRELLA". AS OF APRIL 7 SECOND COPY OF LETTER HAS NOT APPEARED.

5. A DOCUMENT EXTREMELY HOSTILE TO NEW TREATY, AND PURPORTING TO BE HISTORICAL AND LEGAL BRIEF ON THE CANAL ISSUE, HAS BEEN CIRCULATED WIDELY IN THE CANAL ZONE BY THE CANAL ZONE PUBLIC INFORMATION CORPORATION. THE LATTER, INCORPORATED IN DELAWARE WITH A PO BOX IN CRISTOBAL, HAS BEEN MASS MAILING THE DOCUMENT TO ALL CANAL ZONE POST OFFICE BOX HOLDERS. THE DOCUMENT'S TITLE IS "PANAMA CANAL IN DANGER" AND ITS AUTHOR IS DONALD M. DOZER, PROFESSOR OF LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY AND INTER-AMERICAN RELATIONS, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA (COPY SENT TO ARA/PAN).

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PRS-01 SIL-01 EB-03 /038 W
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6. DOZER'S ARGUMENTS ARE FAMILIAR REPETITION OF PSEUDO-LEGALISTIC LOGIC-CHOPPING ABOUT 1903 TREATY, BUT HE GOES BEYOND THE NORM, AND BEYOND PALE OF SCHOLASTIC HONESTY, BY MISQUOTING THE TREATY. COMMENT IN LOCAL PRESS (INCLUDING FULL COLUMN BY POPULAR COLUMNIST CAMILO PEREZ IN "CRITICA" FOR APRIL 1) HAS DIVIDED BETWEEN REBUTTING DOZER'S ARGUMENTATION, AND ASSERTING THAT SUCH EFFORTS APPARENTLY HAVE SUPPORT OF US AUTHORITIES IN CANAL ZONE, WHICH SHOULD BE STOPPING THEM. IN FACT, PANCANAL INFORMS US, CORPORATION APPLIED FOR PO BOX IN USUAL FASHION, AND HAS PAID NORMAL THIRD-CLASS POSTAL RATE FOR ITS MAILINGS.

7. DELEGATION FROM PACIFIC CIVIC COUNCILS WHO RECENTLY VISITED WASHINGTON RETURNED REASONABLY PLEASED WITH VISIT, ALTHOUGH ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THEY COULD BRING BACK NOTHING SPECIFIC FOR EMPLOYEES RELATIVE TO THEIR CURRENT COMPLAINTS AGAINST CANAL ADMINISTRATION ACTIONS. THEY WERE PARTICULARLY PLEASED BY WARM RECEPTION THEY RECEIVED FROM ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS AND WERE GRATEFUL FOR DETAILED BRIEFING PROVIDED BY MINISTER BELL. GROUP PLANS TO PUBLISH REDUCED REPORT OF TRIP, OMITTING REFERENCE TO ANY POINTS PROVIDED THEM STRICTLY FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BACKGROUND, IN PACIFIC CIVIC COUNCIL NEWSLETTER. COUNCIL LEADERSHIP HAS NO CURRENT PLANS TO STAGE MORE MASS RALLIES BUT PACIFIC CIVIC COUNCILS HAVE SENT DR. RICHARD CHEVILLE, CIVIC COUNCIL MEMBER WHO HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF PAST DELEGATIONS TO WASHINGTON, TO APPEAR BEFORE MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES COMMITTEE THIS WEEK.

8. COMMENT: CANAL ZONE AMERICAN EMPLOYEES COMMUNITY REMAINS UPSET, AND WILDEST RUMORS ARE COMMON; ON AT LEAST TWO RECENT OCCASIONS, RUMOR FACTORY HAD SICKOUT STARTING AGAIN. IN RESPONSE TO THIS, GOVERNOR HAS ESTABLISHED TWO TELEPHONE NUMBERS WHICH EMPLOYEES CAN CALL FOR STRAIGHT INFORMATION TO COUNTER RUMORS. THIS HAS HELPED SOME. HOWEVER, EMPLOYEES WHO SIGNED OPEN LETTER ARE BY NO MEANS ALL THE PROVERBIAL REDNECK "ZONIAN" TYPES, AND THEIR ATTITUDE CONFIRMS THAT THE AMERICAN EMPLOYEES AS A BODY ARE NOT ACCEPTING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, THE GOAL OF THE LABOR UNIONS, AS A PANACEA FOR THEIR PARTICULAR COMPLAINTS AGAINS THE CANAL ZONE ADMINISTRATION. NEEDLESS TO SAY, NEITHER DO THEY

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CONSIDER IT AS A VIABLE RESPONSE TO THEIR GENERALIZED
APPREHENSIONS REGARDING THEIR STATUS IN THE FUTURE UNDER A
NEW TREATY. END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONNEL, PUBLIC CORRESPONDENCE, LABOR OBJECTIVES, LABOR POLICY LINE, ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT, CANALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: blochd0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976PANAMA02460
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760133-0546
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760493/aaaadbfm.tel
Line Count: 227
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: STADIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: STADIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: blochd0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 JUL 2004 by MartinML>; APPROVED <28 OCT 2004 by blochd0>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CANAL ZONE EMPLOYEE RELATIONS PROBLEM SUMMARY: CANAL ZONE AMERICAN EMPLOYEES SENT OPEN
TAGS: ELAB, PFOR, PN, PQ, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

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